It's the ultimate catch-22 for the organizationally challenged: to get organized, it seems, you have to be organized.

Yes, you should make a to-do list. Of course, let's cut down on clutter and toss out stuff we don't need. And, sure, it's a great idea to create a mail sorting system so the bills get paid.

While those are good tips, it takes a certain amount of organizational skill to follow them. Taking a few steps at a time is daunting if you're chronically disorganized. Does that mean you're doomed? Not if you take the old advice about how to eat an elephant: do it one bite at a time.

Don't bite off more than you can chew by setting out to completely organize your life. Start with a few nibbles. Break the effort into small, doable tasks. Here are some suggestions for getting started:

» **Prioritize:** Think about where being organized does the most good or where being disorganized causes the most harm. For most of us it's at work. But there can be other important trouble spots, such as personal finances. Disorganization there can be costly. Wherever your organizational Achilles heel happens to be, concentrate on changing things there one step at a time.

» **Make a "To-Do *Plus*" list:** List what you have to get done, plus one small step toward getting organized. For example, your first additional item might be, "Clear desk at end of day." That doesn't mean complete all your work; it means get stuff off the desk so you don't start the next morning wondering how you're going to plow through that mess. After clearing your desk becomes a habit, make something else, such as "Create email folders" – the plus on your list. And keep accumulating those good habits!

» **Use technology:** You don't have to buy a fancy PDA or a Blackberry. Take advantage of what you have. Set your cell phone to remind you of meetings and deadlines or when bills are due. Use your computer's organizing aids – calendars, address books, programmed reminders and, yes, to-do lists.

» **Find a simpler way:** Is your email box cluttered with messages that aren't junk mail, but you know you'll never open? Adjusting your email filter can send them directly to the trash. Are you paying late fees on small bills or missing renewal deadlines because you forgot to mail the check? Consider using automatic bill pay. Start with small stuff to see if it works for you.

» **Make your workspace comfortable:** Adding discomfort to any task makes it more difficult and time consuming. Make sure your chair, your desk, your keyboard, etc. are set or positioned ergonomically. Place the things you need most often close at hand. Don't clutter your space with the rarely used.

» **Take time to relax:** Stress makes you anxious, indecisive and more inefficient. That's a formula for disorganization. Ease your stress. At work, take a walk at lunchtime, and get up from the desk for a few minutes several times a day. At home, make sure to give yourself some quiet time.

Acquiring small organizational habits can make a big difference. With each one added, taking the next step toward being organized gets easier. You'll find tons of tips for getting organized online. Start with your EAP member website: www.eap4soc.mhn.com. For tips from a wide variety of sources check out www.lifeorganizers.com.

Is being disorganized causing you problems financially, emotionally or at work? Call your EAP!

Your Employee Assistance Program provides help in areas affected by how well organized you are, including:

» Job performance
» Emotional health
» Finances
» Everyday life issues

Call *any time* for a telephonic consultation.

For more information, call
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